DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 481 432 CS 512 130

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TITLE	Myth and Truth: The "First Thanksgiving."
INSTITUTION	MarcoPolo Education Foundation.; National Council of Teachers of English, Urbana, IL.; International Reading Association, Newark, DE.
PUB DATE	2003-02-28
NOTE	10p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Managing Editor, ReadWriteThink, International Reading Association, 800 Barksdale Rd., P.O. Box 8139, Newark, DE 19714-8139. E-mail: comments@readwritethink.org. For full text: http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Classroom - Teacher (052)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	American Indian Studies; Colonial History (United States); *Critical Reading; *Cultural Background; Educational Objectives; *Ethnic Bias; Evaluation Methods; Lesson Plans; Middle Schools; *Mythology; *Racial Bias; Reading Instruction; *Reading Strategies; Student Attitudes; Thinking Skills
IDENTIFIERS	*Thanksgiving

ABSTRACT

Behind every myth are many possible truths allowing us to discover who we were as peoples and who we are today. By exploring myths surrounding the Wampanoag, the pilgrims, and the "First Thanksgiving," this lesson asks students to think critically about commonly believed myths regarding the Wampanoag Indians in colonial America. During three 50-minute sessions, grade 6-8 students will: develop strategies for critically examining the origin and characteristics of myth; develop an awareness of the diversities, similarities, and values in various Native American cultural and story traditions; develop awareness of racist and biased language and its impact on readers over centuries; and develop strategies for examining messages for racial and cultural bias. The instructional plan, lists of resources, student assessment/reflection activities, and a list of National Council of Teachers of English/International Reading Association (NCTE/IRA) Standards addressed in the lesson are included. A presentation rubric; a list of common myths about Thanksgiving; a group assignment; and a follow-up writing assignment are attached. (PM)

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Myth and Truth: The "First Thanksgiving"

ED 481 432

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Grade Band

6-8

Estimated Lesson Time

Three 50-minute sessions

Overview

Did the Wampanoag bring the pilgrims popcorn on the first Thanksgiving, as some versions of the story would suggest? Or is that just a myth?

Behind every myth are many possible truths allowing us to discover who we were as peoples and who we are today. By exploring myths surrounding the Wampanoag, the pilgrims, and the "first Thanksgiving," this lesson asks students to think critically about commonly believed myths regarding the Wampanoag Indians in colonial America.

From Theory to Practice

Behind every myth are many possible truths allowing us to discover who we were as peoples and who we are today. Although few young people realize it, understanding the myths that are part of our life (past and present) is an important activity because their values and beliefs have been shaped by the stories they have grown up knowing, by the education they have recieved, and by the landscape within which they have lived. All these contexts have contributed to their world views as individuals, as members of families, and as members of communities.

These activities explore myths regarding the Wampanoag, the Native Americans who interacted with the pilgrims in Massachusetts, traditionally thought of as the participants in the "First Thanksgiving." For more information on why it is important to explore Native American culture and literature with students, see the Introduction to *Roots and Branches*.

This lesson is adapted from a series of activities in Susag, Dorothea M. 1998. *Roots and Branches: A Resource of Native American Literature—Themes, Lessons, and Bibliographies.* Urbana: NCTE.

Student Objectives

Students will

- develop strategies for critically examining the origin and characteristics of myth.
- develop an awareness of the diversities, similarities, and values in various Native American cultural and story traditions.
- develop awareness of racist and biased language and its impact on readers over centuries.
- develop strategies for examining messages for racial and cultural bias.

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Resources

- Myths and Truths Presentation Rubric
- Common Myths of the "First Thanksgiving" Handout
- Thanksgiving Critique Assignment
- Caleb Johnson's Mayflower Web Pages
- The Wampanoag Web Site
- Education World Web Site
- Modern History Sourcebook Web Site
- The First Thanksgiving: Facts and Fancies
- "No Popcorn"
- Wampanoag History Web Site

Instructional Plan

Resources

- Internet access to the Web sites or printouts of the pages from those sites. (If you prefer, a complete copy of "Of Plymouth Plantation" by William Bradford can be used in lieu of the excerpts available on the Web. The piece is available in most American Literature anthologies.)
- Thanksgiving Entry on the ReadWriteThink calendar
- Common Myths about the "First Thanksgiving" handout
- Myths and Truth Presentation Rubric
- General classroom supplies (paper, pens or pencils, chart paper or board, and so forth).
- (Optional) Texts that explore the relationship between colonists and the Wampanoag, and details about the "first Thanksgiving." Possibilities include reference books, encyclopedias, and specific texts such as the following:

  Barth, Edna. 1975. *Turkeys, Pilgrims, and Indian Corn: The Story of Thanksgiving Symbols.* New York: Clarion Books.

  Kamma, Anne. 2001. *If You Were at the First Thanksgiving.* New York: Scholastic.

  Grace, Catherine O'Neill, and Margaret M. Bruchac with Plimoth Plantation. 2001. *1621: A New Look at Thanksgiving.* Washington, DC: National Geographic.

  McGovern, Ann. 1993. *If You Sailed on the* Mayflower *in 1620.* New York: Scholastic.

  For additional suggestions, see Slapin, Beverly, and Doris Seale. 1992. *Through Indian Eyes: The Native Experience in Books for Children*. Philadelphia, PA: New Society Publishers.

Preparation

1. Gather books and Internet printouts, if necessary. Because students will work in small groups, create a copy of the printouts for each group if computer access is not available. Provide a copy of books for each group if resources allow. Groups may have slightly different reference resources (for instance, encyclopedias from different publishers), but all groups should have relatively the same collection of materials on hand. Naturally, you can encourage sharing among groups in the case of scarcer resources.
2. Make copies of the Common Myths about the "First Thanksgiving" handout and the presentation rubric for all students or prepare overheads or chart paper with the information.

Instruction and Activities

Session One

1. Students can complete the prereading questions as homework, as an in-class freewrite before the reading, or in oral class discussion.

    a. What difference does it make who writes a story as long as they tell the "truth"?
    b. How can you tell when a story is true? What would indicate a story wasn't true?
    c. Have you ever read something that was presented as nonfiction but that you knew fiction?

2. Spend ten to fifteen minutes going over students' responses to the prereading prompt. Write their answers on chart paper or an overhead. (You'll return to these answers later in this lesson, so save their responses.)
3. Read "Of Plymouth Plantation" by William Bradford. As students read, ask them to pay particular attention to the way that Bradford talks about the Native Americans that the colonists encounter. Identify the tribe of Native Americans that Bradford and the colonists interacted with as the Wampanoag (pronounced *wham-pan-og,* syllables rhyming with Pam, Can, and Log). For more information on the Wampanoag, see the Boston Children's Museum's Teacher Resources on Native American History and Culture.
4. After reading, ask students to write two questions of their own for the class to consider: one question that is answered in the text and an "I wonder why" question. Use a writer's notebook or response journal for this writing.
5. In small groups, have students share their questions and discuss answers. Monitor student discussion by circulating among the groups.
6. If students have not raised the issue themselves, ask them to consider the implications of vocabulary such as *savage, skulking,* and *aloof* in relationship to the following questions:

    - What might readers conclude about the Wampanoag or about William Bradford, the writer?
    - What are the implications for a European audience, for an audience that had never met the Wampanoag or other Native American people, and for a Native American audience?

7. As a postreading activity, ask students to think about Bradford's discussion of the "First Harvest," which we would think of as the "First Thanksgiving." Give them these guiding questions: What do you notice about Bradford's report that fits with your ideas about the first Thanksgiving, and what seems unusual or seems to have been left out?

Session Two

1. In full-class discussion, have students share their thoughts on the "First Thanksgiving" in light of Bradford's report. Write their ideas on the board or on chart paper. The idea is simply to brainstorm a list for now.
2. Pass out the Common Myths about the "First Thanksgiving" Handout and Presentation Rubric, or show the list on an overhead projector. As you read through the list, encourage students to connect items from their brainstorming list with the myths on the sheet.
3. Demonstrate the "myth-breaking" process (outlined on the handout and below) by answering the three myth/truth questions about the first myth on the handout: "The Wampanoag brought popcorn to the first Thanksgiving feast." See the Plimoth Plantation Web page No Popcorn for background on the myth.
4. Divide students into four to five groups, assigning each group a myth from the sheet. Give groups a variety of resources in which they might uncover truths about common myths about the Wampanoag and the pilgrim settlers.
5. Each group completes the following assignment, preparing to share their findings with the entire class:

    a. Explain your myth answering these two questions:

        - What is a truth in this myth?
        - What are other truths behind this myth that might contradict it?

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b. As a group, you may use any of the materials available to help you understand and explain the myth.
c. Prepare a five-minute presentation to the class that explains your understanding of the myth, using creative drama, visual aids such as posters, music, illustrations, or an oral presentation.

6. As students work in their groups, circulate and monitor student progress. Let them know a few minutes before the work period will conclude so that they have time to wrap up their thoughts.

Session Three

1. Give students five to ten minutes to make last-minute preparations and to practice their presentation.
2. Have groups present their myth to the entire class, sticking closely to the five-minutes-per-group guideline that you've established.
3. Once all of the groups have presented, return to the original prereading questions:

   a. What difference does it make who writes a story as long as they tell the "truth"?
   b. How can you tell when a story is true? What would indicate a story wasn't true?

4. Read through the student responses, and conclude the lesson with a discussion of their original perceptions of "truth." Which observations do they still agree with? Which would they change? What would they add?

Web Resources

Caleb Johnson's Mayflower Web Pages
http://members.aol.com/calebj/
Caleb Johnson's Mayflower Web pages include a vast collection of transcribed documents, historical information, and myth-busting material. Teachers may need to choose among the resources to find those best suited for their students.

Wampanaog History
http://www.tolatsga.org/wampa.html
This Wampanoag History site provides in-depth details on the Wampanoag including their language, where they lived, names of subtribes and historical and cultural information.

The Wampanoag
http://www.bostonkids.org/teachers/TC/
The Boston Children's Museum and Wampanoag Indian Advisors work together to create and maintain this site that details the history, culture, and heritage of the Wampanoag Indians. The extensive site include images of present-day Wampanoag as well as audio files of their stories and details on their heritage.

Modern History Sourcebook
http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1650bradford.html
These excerpts from the Modern History Sourcebook provide the text for "From History of Plymouth Plantation" by William Bradford.

The First Thanksgiving: Facts and Fancies
http://www.plimoth.org/Library/Thanksgiving/firstT.htm
The First Thanksgiving: Facts and Fancies is a part of the Web site of the Plimoth Plantation. The page details many myths with links to additional information.

Education World
http://www.edcuation-world.com/a_curr/curr040.shtml
This Education World site asks, "Are You Teaching the Real Story of the 'First Thanksgiving'?" The site includes details on the pilgrims and Wampanoag, stereotypes, and teaching suggestions.

"No Popcorn"
http://www.plimoth.org/Library/Thanksgiving/nopopc.htm
The Plimoth Plantation proclaims "No Popcorn!" This page outlines the fictional start to the myth that the Wampanoag brought popcorn to the "First Thanksgiving," explaining who began the myth, how the story spread, and why the myth is not believable.

Student Assessment/Reflections

- Monitor student interaction and progress during group work to assess social skills and assist any students having problems with the project.
- Use the Myths and Truth Presentation Rubric to assess group presentations.
- Assign an independent analysis and critique writing task to students which allows them to apply their skills individually. The following general Thanksgiving Critique assignment would work well:

  > Critique the pictures in a Thanksgiving children's book or a Thanksgiving poster or advertisement which depicts traditional, stereotyped Pilgrim and Wampanoag figures. Critically analyze the images, noting the myths and underlying truths that are evident in the depiction.

  Be sure to focus students on a particular image to ensure that they do not become overwhelmed by the idea of critiquing all the image in a book. For instance, you might ask students to write about the cover of a children's book.
- As a class, develop a list of questions or strategies for examining future readings and texts for racial and cultural bias (thus summarizing and applying the information from the lesson).

NCTE/IRA Standards

1 - Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.

2 - Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.

3 - Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).

9 - Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles.

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Myth and Truth: The "First Thanksgiving" Presentation Rubric

Category	Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Needs Improvement
Understanding of Topic	The team clearly understood the topic. They convincingly demonstrated an awareness of the biases in the material that they examined and the relationship between bias and culture.	The team clearly understood the topic. They demonstrated an awareness of the biases in the material that they examined and the relationship between bias and culture.	The team seemed to understand the topic. They were aware of the biases in the material that they examined.	The team did not seem to understand the topic and/or were not aware of the biases in the material they examined.
Presentation Style	The team consistently used gestures, eye contact, voice and enthusiasm in a way that kept the audience interested.	The team usually used gestures, eye contact, voice and enthusiasm to try and keep their audience's attention.	The team sometimes used gestures, eye contact, and appropriate voice to keep their audience's attention.	One or more of the members did not use body language or style to keep the audience's attention. Someone may have been a distraction.
Information	The team presented information that fully and accurately explained the origin and characteristics of the myth. The information was clear and logical.	The team presented information that accurately explained the origin and characteristics of the myth. The information was generally clear and logical.	Most of the information accurately explained the origin and characteristics of the myth. There may have been some mistakes or some things that were not clear.	The information did not accurately explained the origin and characteristics of the myth and/or the information did not make sense.

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Common Myths about the "First Thanksgiving"

Myth: The Wampanoag brought popcorn to the first Thanksgiving feast.

Myth: The First Official Thanksgiving took place near Plymouth Rock in 1621.

Myth: The Native Americans the Pilgrims encountered lived in tipis and traveled on horseback..

Myth: The Native Americans wore elaborate head dresses with many feathers.

Myth: The Pilgrims shared pumpkin pie, corn on the cob, and sweet potatoes (or yams) with the Wampanoag.

Myth: The harvest feast celebrated by Pilgrims and Wampanoags in the fall of 1621 was the first of its kind in the Americas.

Group Assignment

1. Explain the myth that your group has been assigned, answering these three questions:
   - What is a truth in this myth?
   - What are other truths behind this myth that might contradict it?
   - What does the myth reveal about those who believe it?
2. As a group, you may use any of the materials available to help you understand and explain the myth.
3. Prepare a five-minute presentation to the class that explains your understanding of the myth, using creative drama, visual aids such as posters, music, illustrations, or an oral presentation.

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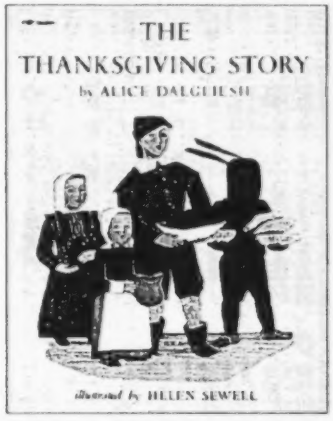
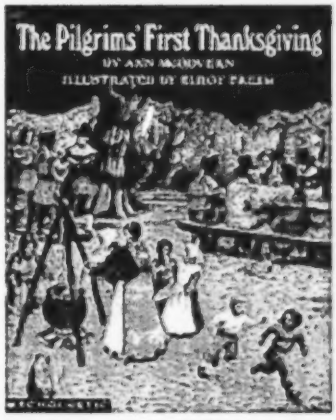
Myth and Truth: The "First Thanksgiving" Follow-Up Writing Assignment

Critique the pictures on a Thanksgiving children's book cover. Look for traditional, stereotyped Pilgrim and Wampanoag figures as well as images that do not match the "truth" we've learned about the "First Thanksgiving." Write a paper that analyzes the images, noting the myths and underlying truths that are evident in the depiction.

Choose one of the following book covers. Be sure to indicate the title of the book in your paper.





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